

Loving Israel

ISRAELI AMBASSADOR CELEBRATES JEWISH-CHRISTIAN TIES WITH 2,000 BELIEVERS AT WINTER EVENT—CORNERSTONE CHAPEL, LEESBURG, VA.

Story by Margot Bass and Austin Hamrick
Photos by Bob Updegrave unless otherwise noted

On January 30, 2019, temperatures plummeted in Northern Virginia—yet nearly 2,000 people waited patiently to enter Cornerstone Chapel, a Calvary Chapel affiliate in Leesburg. The day’s low temperature of nine degrees outside and the reality of facing serious security measures inside couldn’t keep them from witnessing a message of hope and appreciation from Ron Dermer, Israel’s ambassador to the United States. According to Cornerstone Senior Pastor Gary Hamrick, “Our folks were willing to stand out in the bitter cold to get the chance to celebrate our [Christian] ties with Israel and our love for the Jewish people. The ambassador told me afterwards that he couldn’t believe that many people came out, and that they really did show their love.”



Pastor Gary Hamrick

Standing “with” and “in” Israel

Ambassador Dermer spoke of the resiliency and history of the nation of Israel, offering thanks to the United States and the evangelical community for their continued support and prayers. “While the night may be very cold outside, the relationship between our two countries has never been warmer and has never been better. The United States of America is the backbone of support for Israel around the world, and the remarkable community of



Ambassador Ron Dermer

devout Christians [here] is the backbone of that backbone,” he stated. “So, on behalf of nearly nine million citizens of Israel, thank you for standing with Israel.”

Now the LORD had said to Abram ... “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

GENESIS 12:1a-3

The ambassador expressed his desire to see the evangelical community lead the way against a current rise in worldwide anti-Semitism. The relationship between the Jewish and Christian worlds has in the past been marked by enmity and hostility, he noted. “In the years since, [many evangelical Christians and Israel] have transformed that relationship into a friendship. Now I believe we have to go even deeper and build a deep partnership to defend our common civilization. I believe that it’s the Christian community who should lead the struggle against the darkness of this modern anti-Semitism, standing with the Jewish people and the Jewish State to push [it] back.”

He also encouraged the audience to support Israel by physically “standing in” his country. “Every Christian around the world should come to Israel to recharge their Christian identities, to see the Bible come to life, to learn the truth, and study the Word of God,” he urged. “I believe the greatest threat to Israel is a world that no longer



Photo by Tom Price



Photo by Tom Price

Top right: Pastor Gary Hamrick of Cornerstone Chapel presents Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer with a miniature menorah in January.

Bottom center: A father brings his sons to the Western Wall, a remnant of the Jewish temple, in Jerusalem.

Bottom right: The Western Wall in Jerusalem is a popular tourist destination. The ambassador encouraged Christians to visit Israel.



Photo by Freepik

Top left: The U.S. Embassy is now located in the ancient city of Jerusalem. Ambassador Dermer thanked the Christian community for its support of Israel and urged believers to stand against anti-Semitism.

Bottom right: Nearly 2,000 people, braving the cold and tight security, worshiped the Lord during the event.

believes in right and wrong, ... in truth and falsehood. The stronger you teach [these concepts], the stronger your Christian identity is, the stronger will be your support for Israel.”

During a question-and-answer session, Gary reminded the audience of Psalm 121:4: **Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.** He added Psalm 122:6: **Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.”**

Gary added that he was deeply impacted by the ambassador’s gratitude to the U.S. and to believers. “[Israel] loves not only the fact that tourism is bolstered by Christians visiting the Holy Land, but by our genuine ideological support, as well as our biblical views of the importance and significance of Israel,” he observed. After the speech, Gary thanked Ambassador Dermer by presenting him with a gift—a small menorah, a candelabrum used in Jewish worship, with the base of a fish (the Christian symbol) interlocked with the Star of David (the Jewish symbol)—representing the unity and common roots of Judaism and Christianity.

The ambassador affirmed lasting friendship. “Rest assured, no matter what darkness surrounds us, Israel will continue to proudly carry [its] torch, and I know that as we do, the United States of America will stand there right by our side.” He praised the U.S. for the decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. That decision, he said, recognizes publicly the Jewish right to the land. “The Jewish people will never forget ... it will be remembered for all time,” he stated. He added that Israel is also deeply grateful for the decision to withdraw America from a nuclear deal with Iran, restoring sanctions against the Islamic country. “Never has there been a more important decision ... made for the security of Israel,” the ambassador emphasized.

Months of Preparation

Gary invited the ambassador to Cornerstone after attending the 17th Annual Christian Solidarity Event at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, in May 2018. “It got me to thinking. I wondered if he would ever come to my church to tell our folks [what he told us],” Gary recalled, laughing as he described the complicated logistics of hosting such an event. The church had to be approved; Gary

met twice with the ambassador’s chief of staff before finally setting a date.

“The ambassador had never done a large public forum like this before,” Gary said; the chief of staff and security personnel told him that the ambassador usually only goes to smaller events—where guests are pre-screened and limited by invitation only. “It was honestly pretty daunting. I was not expecting the amount of security required.” The church had to hire an outside security firm and use bomb-sniffing dogs and other assistance from the Leesburg Police and Loudoun County Sheriff’s departments. Everyone who entered the church was checked for weapons. In addition, the church was not allowed to advertise the event on its website or any social media. “I could only announce it in the church services. Word of mouth was fine,” he recounted.

Redemption through the Jewish Messiah

Gary admitted that he was questioned about sharing his pulpit with an Orthodox Jew who doesn’t believe Jesus is the Messiah. “In my office, I talked about the Lord with him. We still love the same God, and I’m going to pray for the Jewish people to come to faith in Jesus,” he explained. “But I still have a love and respect for God’s whole plan of redemption that came through the Jewish Messiah and the Jewish people. To honor them and show respect goes a long way.”

He recalled the apostle Paul’s words in Romans chapter 11 describing how Gentiles [non-Jews] were grafted into God’s family in salvation through the Jewish people. **And if the root [Abraham and the patriarchs] is holy, so are the branches [Israelites]. And if some of the branches were broken off [due to unbelief], and you [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you** (Romans 11:16b-18).

“We need to appreciate that we’ve been grafted into the vine, [into a relationship with Jesus]. You don’t kick the head of somebody when you’re standing on their shoulders. We have to be very mindful that God used Israel and the Jewish Messiah to bring salvation to the whole world, to those who would believe in Him. For that reason alone, we can show our gratitude to the Jewish people,” Gary said. 🙏

As it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”
ROMANS 11:26b-27

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